

A STUDY ON SNOW SPORT IN SAPPORO --ACCELERATED DECLINE, POLARIZATION, AND PRIVILEGED ACCESS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe the dynamic state of snow sport participation from the viewpoint of socio-economics as well as to consider factors that might promote or control snow sport participation in Sapporo, a northern Japanese city of 1.9 million people that has an annual snowfall of over five meters.

The snow sport population of Sapporo has been decreasing. According to Kureha (2002) and Tsukahara (2010), in the last 15 years the Japanese snow sport population has decreased from approximately 13,676,000 to 7,319,000 so many local governments with snow sport grounds have been facing ski area managerial problems. The Division for Sport within the Sapporo Municipal Office reported that the number of estimated guests of a ski area in Hokkaido had decreased from approximately 8,600,000 in 1991 to 4,660,000 in 2005. Similarly, the number of ski areas has declined from 146 in 1994 to 106 in 2008 so the market scale of snow sport in Hokkaido is shrinking, too. However, the Sapporo local government aims to revive snow sports in order to improve the sport's participation rate and to strengthen the identity of local citizenry.

Although Kawanishi (1999; 2000; 2006) analyzed the managerial problems affecting various ski grounds in Hokkaido, including the importance of inbound visitors for managers and local governments from the detailed fieldwork, his studies did not take note of local snow sport participants. Books written and edited by Suda (1998; 2006), a popular Japanese physical education scholar, have tried to clarify lifestyles in northern regions, but snow sport population in Sapporo was out of his field of vision. Therefore, despite the need to recognize this reality so as to make sport policy effective and to evaluate it, no one has yet described the dynamic decline of the snow sport population in Sapporo. Without this study, we cannot have any idea about "who does snow sports and what factors can be found that would control the snow sport

participation in this region?"

In order to answer to these questions, this study analyzes the 'Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities,' which is one of the most popular survey records carried out every five years. This survey includes information on sport participation and is executed by the Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. In order to investigate local sport life and culture, we also analyzed the 'Questionnaire regarding Sapporo Citizen's Sport Participation and Environment,' which was commissioned for us by the Sapporo local government and was carried out between December 2009 and January 2010.

The findings in this study can be summarized as follows:

1) The snow sport population in the Sapporo metropolis has decreased from 30.2% in 1986 to 12.3% in 2006, at an accelerated pace as much as 3.0 pt. down from 86 to 91, 3.9 pt. down from 91 to 96, 4.6 pt. down from 96 to 01, and 6.4 pt. down from 01 to 06. We analyzed this decline by sex and age group with cross tabulation and found that snow sports might be enjoyed more by male and the younger groups than female and the elder groups (see fig. 1).

2) The average days of snow sport participation has increased from 10.3 days in 1996 to 14.9 days in 2006. Therefore, considering the circumstances mentioned above, Sapporo's snow sport participators have become more specific group, i.e., the polarization on snow sport participation in this region has been progressed (see fig. 2).

3) According to a result of binary logistic regression analysis on snow sport participation from the viewpoint of socio-economics, it becomes evident that Sapporo's snow sport participation is ordered by generation, occupation, annual income, and sport experience in one's college days. Being in over age 50 is an inhibiting factor, and being a professional or engineer, earning more than 3 million yen as annual income, or having sport experience in his / her college days, are promoting factors (see tab. 1).

We conclude our presentation with a discussion on the relationship between these findings and social stratification theory, which indicates that snow sport can be considered as a privileged culture in Sapporo. If this is the case, it might be quite difficult to promote snow sport for all Sapporo citizens, so we will need a new policy to encourage more people to do snow sports irrespective of their socio-economic background.

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